



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of Public Affairs
Region 5
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Illinois, Indiana
Michigan, Minnesota
Ohio, Wisconsin

Western Mineral Products Site Cleanup to Resume in Spring

Minneapolis, Minnesota

February 2001

This Fact Sheet Will Tell You About:

- The background of the site.
- Cleanup activities conducted in the fall 2000.
- When the cleanup will resume.
- What the future cleanup activities will involve.
- How to get more information.



Tape barricades the working area at a resident's home in Minneapolis.

Introduction

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) has been conducting cleanup activities in the northeast portions of Minneapolis as a result of asbestos contamination at the Western Mineral Products site. This fact sheet explains the site background and summarizes site activities to date. It also describes potential exposures and explains how residents can contact U.S. EPA.

Site Background

The Western Mineral Products site is composed of industrial property in northeast Minneapolis at 1720 Madison Street and 1815 Jefferson Street in Hennepin County, Minnesota, and surrounding residential properties. The industrial site is bordered on the north by Electramatic, Inc., on the east by Burlington Northern & Santa Fe railroad tracks, on the west by Jefferson Street, and on the south by a commercial complex.

Western Mineral Products, Inc. was purchased by W.R. Grace Co. in 1963 to manufacture vermiculite insulation from vermiculite ore that was mined in Libby, Montana. The Minneapolis facility operated from the late 1930s to the

late 1980s. During operations, piles of waste vermiculite rock were placed outside the facility. This rock was offered to anyone, free of charge. Residents in Logan Park and other neighborhoods may have used this material for driveway or yard fill, in pet enclosures, gardens, barbeque pits, children's sand boxes, or carried it in the trunks of their cars for traction in the snow. Unfortunately, the vermiculite ore from Libby was found to contain high levels of tremolite asbestos. The waste material, "crushed rock" or "stoner rock," also contains high levels of asbestos.

In 1990, W.R. Grace allegedly conducted a removal of all material stored in two on-site silos. Currently, the site is owned by the firm of Madison Complex and leased to Panel Specialities, Inc., which manufactures prison furniture.

Site Activities

In February 2000, U.S. EPA conducted a site assessment of the former Western Mineral Products site. The interior and exterior portions of the building were inspected. Samples taken from outside the building contained asbestos.

In April 2000, U.S. EPA representatives conducted additional sampling of surface soils near the facility that appeared to have visual evidence of vermiculite or asbestos. At that time, there was a recently excavated trench along the western edge of the facility where a new electrical transformer was to be installed. U.S. EPA observed an unusual layer of what appeared to be vermiculite two feet below the surface in the trench. Samples collected on the facility property contained asbestos. At about this time, the first public meeting about asbestos and vermiculite was hosted by the City of Minneapolis. Currently, owners of the industrial site (Madison Complex) are participating in a voluntary cleanup program under the direction of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

In June and August 2000, U.S. EPA collected residential samples. The U.S. EPA team began a walkthrough of the residential area within a ¼-mile radius of the site. The team attempted to contact residents of homes where suspect asbestos-containing material was visible. Residents were asked about the possibility of the transfer of material from the Western Mineral Products facility to their premises.

In September 2000, U.S. EPA representatives were available to talk with residents about vermiculite processed at Western Mineral Products, Inc. Informational pamphlets were delivered to approximately 400 residents. Phone numbers were provided to residents who wanted to schedule an appointment with U.S. EPA for a visual inspection of their property. U.S. EPA conducted approximately 100 environmental assessment interviews in the Logan Park neighborhood. Findings of asbestos contamination in public areas, such as alleyways and streets, and increased public concern have served to increase the area of investigation to include approximately one square mile.

In October 2000, U.S. EPA established a field office in the Logan Park neighborhood near the industrial site. The office served as a command post for the cleanup activities. Through facts sheets, an October 11, 2000, public meeting, and two informal open houses, residents have been urged to contact U.S. EPA if asbestos contamination is suspected. A local U.S. EPA hotline (612-706-0615) was established at the site. A total of 313 residences have been inspected to date. Of the 313 residences inspected, 244 require no further action, 23 are targeted for further soil sampling, 25 are targeted for spring cleanup, and 21 residential properties have already been cleaned up. The cleanup involved vacuuming alleys behind the asbestos-contaminated residential properties with a high-powered vacuum system and excavating soil from residential properties with visible asbestos. During these activities, the work area and neighborhood air was monitored. Of the 21 residences cleaned up, 16 alleys/residential properties were vacuumed. Soil on all 21 residential properties was excavated and restored. Twelve residences will be revisited in spring 2001 in order to excavate contaminated lawn areas that could not be restored in the fall due to cold weather.

Asbestos Exposure

People who work in industries that use asbestos or asbestos-containing products, such as construction material, may breathe fibers into their lungs. In addition, people who live or work near asbestos-related operations may inhale asbestos fibers that enter the air through releases of materials into the air. Some asbestos fibers are so small they invisibly float in the air. People may also swallow asbestos if they eat in

areas where there are asbestos fibers in the air. People who have the waste vermiculite material from the Western Mineral Products site, or other vermiculite-processing facilities, on their property may be exposed to asbestos. The amount of asbestos a person is exposed to will vary according to the number of fibers that are in the air and how long a person breathes the air containing the fibers.

Some people exposed to asbestos have health problems; some do not. After asbestos fibers are inhaled, they can easily enter body tissues. The fibers may become trapped in airways and lung tissue. Diseases related to asbestos may not show up until years later. Today, health problems are showing up in people who worked with asbestos during World War II. If you believe you have asbestos-containing material on your property grounds, you should contact a U.S. EPA representative through the toll-free number listed on the back page.

The Next Step

U.S. EPA will not be conducting any inspections or excavations during the winter months due to expected weather conditions. The U.S. EPA local hotline (612-706-0615) will remain open for citizens to call to request property inspections to be conducted in the spring. Site activities will resume in spring 2001 with additional residential cleanups and residential inspections as necessary.

For More Information

Information Repository

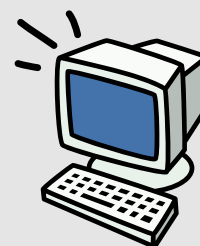
Western Mineral Products site technical documents and information about the Superfund process are available for review in the local information repository listed below:



Minneapolis Public Library Northeast
2200 Central Avenue Northeast
Minneapolis, MN 55418

Web Sites

U.S. EPA Web Site:
<http://www.epa.gov>
U.S. EPA Headquarters
Asbestos Page:
<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>



Contact Names

The names, addresses, and phone numbers of U.S. EPA officials working on the Western Mineral Products site are listed on the back page of this fact sheet.

Mailing List

If you did not receive this fact sheet by mail, you are not on U.S. EPA's mailing list for the Western Mineral Products site. To add your name to the mailing list to receive future information concerning the site, please fill out this form, detach, and mail to:

Mr. Stuart Hill
Community Involvement Coordinator
Office of Public Affairs (P-19J)
U.S. EPA Region 5
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60604-3590

Name _____
Affiliation _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Contact Information

For additional information about site activities or about asbestos and vermiculite, you may contact the following:

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Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
ATSDR Information Line (Atlanta, Georgia): (888) 42-ATSDR (1-888-422-8737)

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